IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 2-16 and 18-20.

Please amend claim 1 and 17 as follows. Each amended claim is submitted herein in the form of a rewritten claim, that is, in clean form in accordance with 37 CFR 1.121(c)(1)(i).

Enclosed on pages separate from the amendment is a marked up version of each amended claim in accordance with 37 CFR 1.121(c)(1)(ii).

1. (Amended) A comparator for use with a time-temperature indicator, said indicator for external monitoring of time-temperature history of a product, the time-temperature indicator having an active portion having an initial color and which undergoes chemical changes as time elapses and at a rate related to the temperature of the surrounding environment wherein the chemical changes produce changes in the color of the active portion, the comparator comprising:

a supporting member;

a plurality of comparator stages located on the support member, each comparator stage comprising a first portion having a reference color and a second portion having a predetermined color that is the same as one of the colors to which the active portion of the time-temperature indicator changes, the colors of the second portions of the comparator stages darkening in a progressive manner such that the predetermined color of the second portion of a first one of the comparator stages is substantially lighter than the reference color of the first stage and the predetermined color of the second portion of a last one of the comparator stages is substantially darker than the reference color of the last comparator stage;

information describing a condition of said product at each comparator stage; indicia means located on the support member to facilitate identification of each stage, said indicia means corresponding to a condition of said product at a said stage as described by the information; and

means for storing said information;

whereby a user of the comparator compares the color of the active portion of the time-temperature indicator to each comparator stage to determine if the color of the

active portion is the same as the color of the second portion of any of the comparator stages; and

whereby said user correlates the indicia of the stage, having the same color as said active portion, with said storing means for accessing information corresponding to the indicia for determining the condition of the product.

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17. (Amended) A method of determining the time-temperature condition of a food product having applied thereto a time-temperature indicator, the indicator having an active portion having an initial color and which undergoes chemical changes as time elapses and at a rate related to the temperature of the surrounding environment wherein the chemical changes produces changes in color of the active portion, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a comparator comprising support member, and a plurality of comparator stages located on the support member, each comparator stage comprising a first portion having a reference color and a second portion having a predetermined color that is the same as one of the colors to which the active portion of the time-temperature indicator changes, the colors of the second portions of the comparator stages darkening in a progressive manner such that the predetermined color of the second portion of a first one of the comparator stages is substantially lighter than the reference color of the first stage and the predetermined color of the second portion of a last one of the comparator stages is substantially darker than the reference portion of the last comparator stage;

(b) comparing the color of the active portion of the time-temperature indicator to the predetermined color of the second portion of each comparator stage;

(c) selecting the comparator stage having the second portion with the predetermined color that matches the color of the active portion of the time-temperature indicator;

(d) storing information describing a condition of the product, each condition being identified by an indicia identifying the condition of the product at a particular stage;

(e) correlating the indicia of the selected comparator stage to a particular condition of the product; and

(f) retrieving said stored information describing the condition of the product at the selected comparator stage.